

North Carolina Public Schools
Annual Dropout Event Report for School Year 2004-05

Introduction to Analysis

This is the annual report on dropout event rates in North Carolina for the 2004-05 school year. It is based on data collected and reported by each school district and charter school in North Carolina, and reflects the dropout events occurring in the public schools during the previous school year (2004-05). For the purposes of this analysis, a dropout event is defined as a student dropping out of school in grades 1 through 12. It does not include students below the compulsory school age or students in Pre-kindergarten or Kindergarten.

Ten findings from the 2004-05 dropout event analysis:

1. The high school (grades 9 through 12) dropout event rate decreased slightly in 2004-05. (The difference was just over 0.1 percent. There were more dropouts than in the previous school year, and there were more students in membership.)
2. There were more than 20,000 dropout events recorded statewide for grades 9 through 12.
3. One-third of all dropout events occurred during the 9th grade year.
4. Nearly 3 percent of all dropout events in 2004-05 were duplicated, meaning that the students had dropped out at least once before.
5. Nearly 10 percent of the dropout events were coded as "Enrollment in a community college," a marked increase over the previous three years.
6. Most dropout events occurred among students between the ages of 16 to 18.
7. The dropout event rate for American Indians, Hispanics, and Blacks, respectively, was higher than the overall average for the state. For Asians, however, the rate was lower than average.
8. The dropout event rate for students in grade 12 increased by nearly 1 percent.
9. From 2003-04 to 2004-05, the number of dropout events coded as "Expulsion" increased from 92 in 2003-04 to 134 in 2004-05 in grades 1 through 12. This is an increase of 46 percent.
10. Nearly 5 percent of the dropout events in 2004-05 in grades 9 through 12 were coded as "Failure to return after a long-term suspension" or "Incarceration." These dropout events are not included in the ABCs dropout rate.

The Annual Dropout Event Report

The annual dropout event report for 2004-05, presented to the State Board of Education on March 1, 2006, consists of a summary document and data tables available online at

www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/. Table 1 presents the 2004-05 dropout event counts and rates in grades 9 through 12 for

each local school district and selected charter schools. Tables 2 and 3 contain the dropout events and rates in grades 9 through 12, and 7 through 12, respectively, for 2004-05 and the five previous years. Tables 4 and 5 report the dropout events in grades 9 through 12, and 7 through 12, respectively, by school district, gender, and ethnicity. Table 6 reports dropout events in grades 1 through 12 by school and district, gender, and ethnicity.

Data Tables 1 through 6 are available in both Excel and PDF. Minor discrepancies of “n” sizes of grade-level and/or ethnic groups between the various tables and graphs are due to differing rules of analysis and sources of data. Graphing software rounded rates to one decimal place; data in the Excel tables were rounded to two decimal places.

“Dropout” and event rate defined

A dropout is defined by State Board policy (HSP-Q-001) as “any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school.” A dropout is a student who enrolled at some time during the previous school year but who was not enrolled (and who does not meet reporting exclusions) on day 20 of the current school year.

Since 1998, the rates have included the dropout events of students who leave the public schools to attend community colleges. By law (General Statute 115C-27) these rates do not include student expulsions. Reporting exclusions also include students who transfer to another public or private school, home school, or a state-approved educational program (which includes schools operated by the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).

In North Carolina, the event rate approximates the percentage of students who dropped out during one year’s time. This type of rate can be compared from year to year and it is useful for studying the effects of events, like economic changes or education policies, on the tendency for students to drop out of school. Event rates are sometimes referred to as “duplicate” counts, since a single individual may be counted as a dropout more than once if he/she drops out of school in multiple years. However, no student who drops out is counted more than once per year.

What the numbers mean

The calculations to determine the dropout event rate for 2004-05 were based on the number of dropouts (numerator), divided by the average student membership for two years (2004-05 and 2005-06), with minor adjustments particular to North Carolina. The rates provided in this report indicate the approximate percent of dropouts per 100 students in a school year. North Carolina’s 2004-05 high school dropout event rate of 4.7 percent means that there were slightly fewer than 5 dropouts per 100 students. There is another way of thinking about this: for all students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in 2004-05, approximately 1 out of every 20 students was lost.

Data collection

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction¹ collected and compiled data submitted by each local school district and charter school. The school districts across the state began submitting their data in October 2005. Over the course of several months, the data were collected, cleaned, reviewed, and verified by the local districts. It is important to remember that these data are self-reported by the districts, and the State agency does not conduct an official audit.

Data trends and highlights from 2004-05

North Carolina's dropout event rates over time

The statewide event dropout rate declined only slightly from 2003-04. Over time, however, a more significant decline has occurred. The dropout event rate in North Carolina has declined from 6.4 percent in 1999-2000 to 4.7 percent in 2004-05. The dropout events, however, have increased slightly in number since 2002-03, as shown in Figure 1.

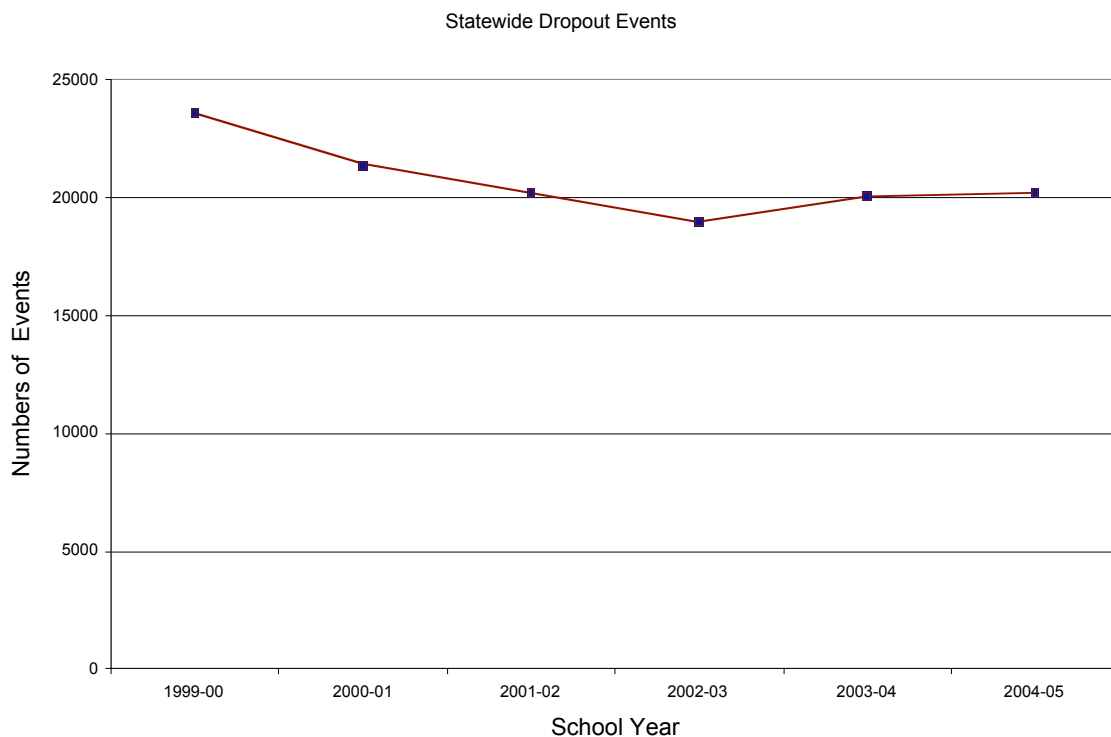


Figure 1. Annual dropout events in grades 9 through 12 from 1999-2000 to 2004-05.

Ages and grades of dropouts

North Carolina's compulsory school law, G.S. 115C-364, requires school attendance for all children between the ages of 7 and 16. It is reasonable, therefore, that dropout events increase in frequency as students reach 16 years of age. In 2004-05, most dropout events occurred between the ages of 16 and 18, as they have done historically. See Figure 2.

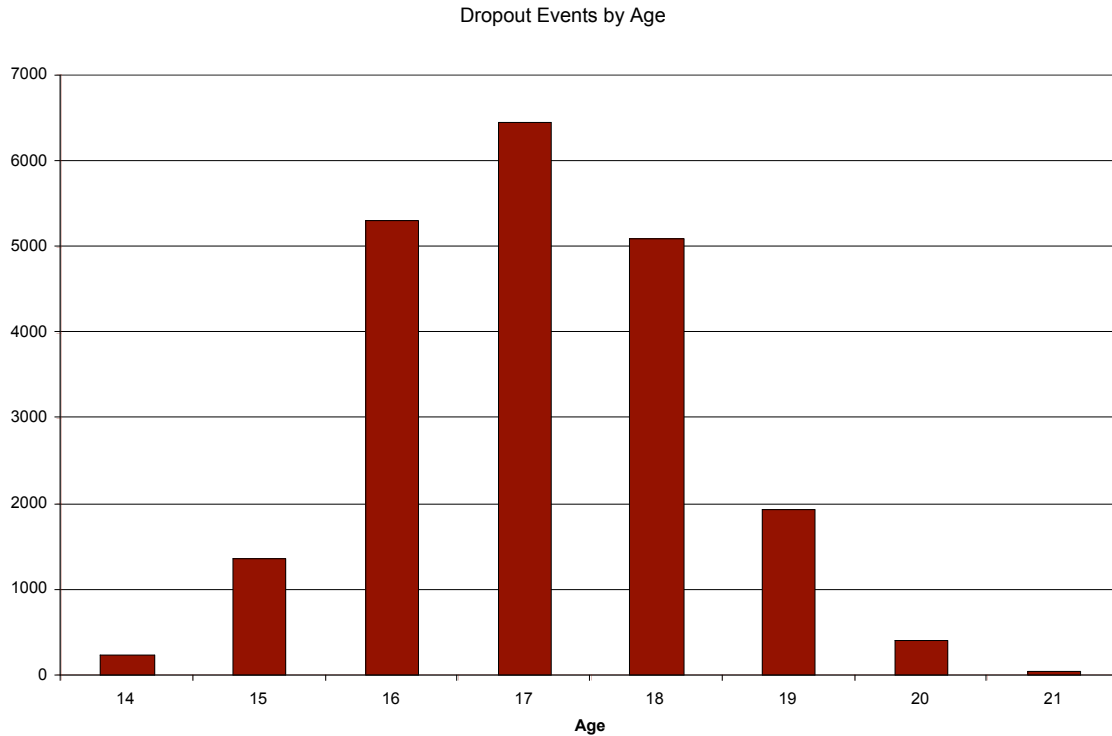


Figure 2. Frequency distribution of dropout events in grades 1 through 12 by age in 2004-05.

An analysis of dropout events by all grades, 1 through 12, revealed that students dropped out more frequently at grade 9 (33.7%), followed by grade 10 (25.9%), grade 11 (21.7%), and 12 (14.3%) respectively. Historically, most dropout events have occurred at grade 9. There was, however, a slight increase in the dropout rate for students in grade 12 over the previous two years, 2003-04 (13.5%) and 2002-03 (13.0%). Results of the grade level analysis are shown in Figure 3.

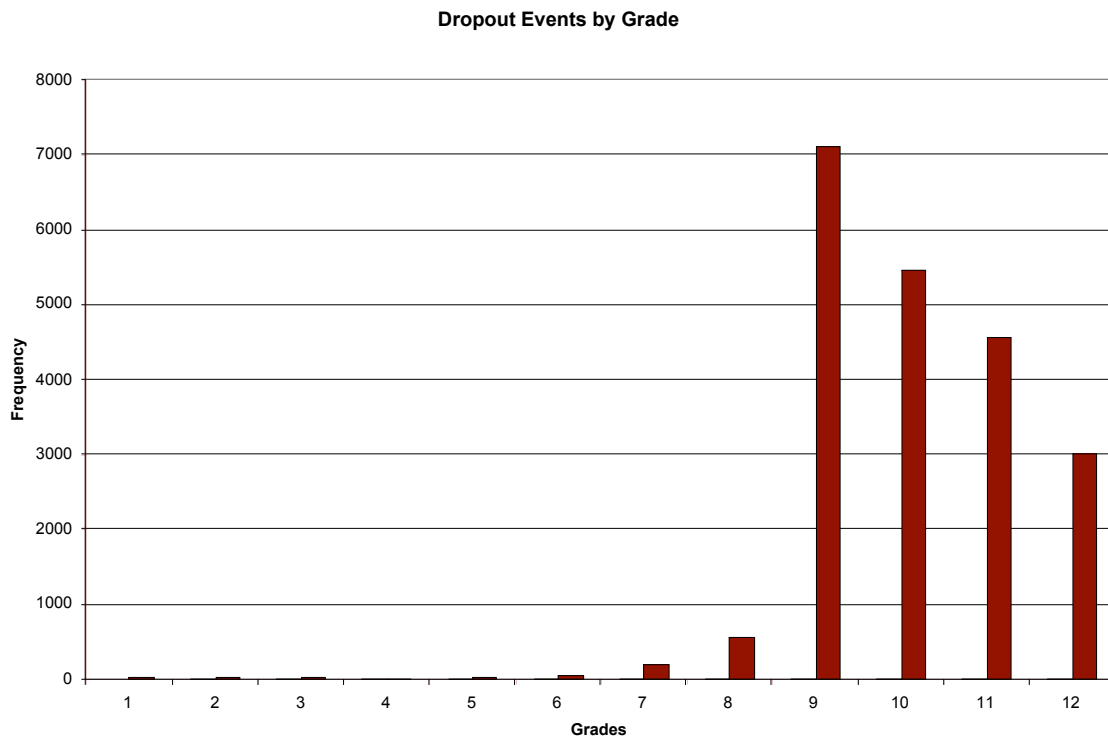


Figure 3. Frequency distribution of 2004-05 dropout events in grades 1 through 12 by grade level.

Reasons for dropping out.

State law (G.S. 115C-47) requires that when local school building-level officials determine that a student plans to drop out of school, the principal or another designated school official must confer with the student. This conference should include a discussion of the reasons for the decision to drop out. In the dropout data collection, reasons are coded at the district level for each dropout event, and those data are submitted to the State agency. It must be remembered that there are certain circumstances when a school official has to provide an “approximate” reason for a student’s leaving school. In other words, the reason may not be verifiable because the student cannot be located.

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency of reason codes that were submitted in the 2004-05 dropout data collection for events that occurred in grades 9 through 12. Most dropout events in these years were coded with a reason code related to school attendance. Six out of ten dropout events in grades 9 through 12 were attributed to attendance, while fewer than one out of ten were coded with “Moved, school status unknown.”

“Enrollment in a community college” was coded for nearly 10 percent of the dropout events in grades 1 through 12, a higher percentage than in either of the previous three years.

Nearly 5 percent of the dropout events were coded with reasons related to suspension and incarceration. There were 712 events that were attributed to “Long-term Suspension (LTSU),” and 226 events attributed to “Incarceration (INCR).” See Figure 4.

Students who are expelled from a school and who fail to return to school are coded with “Expulsion” as a reason for dropping out. These students are not included in the official counts or rates that appear in this report. In 2004-05, there were 117 dropout events coded with “Expulsion” in grades 9 through 12.

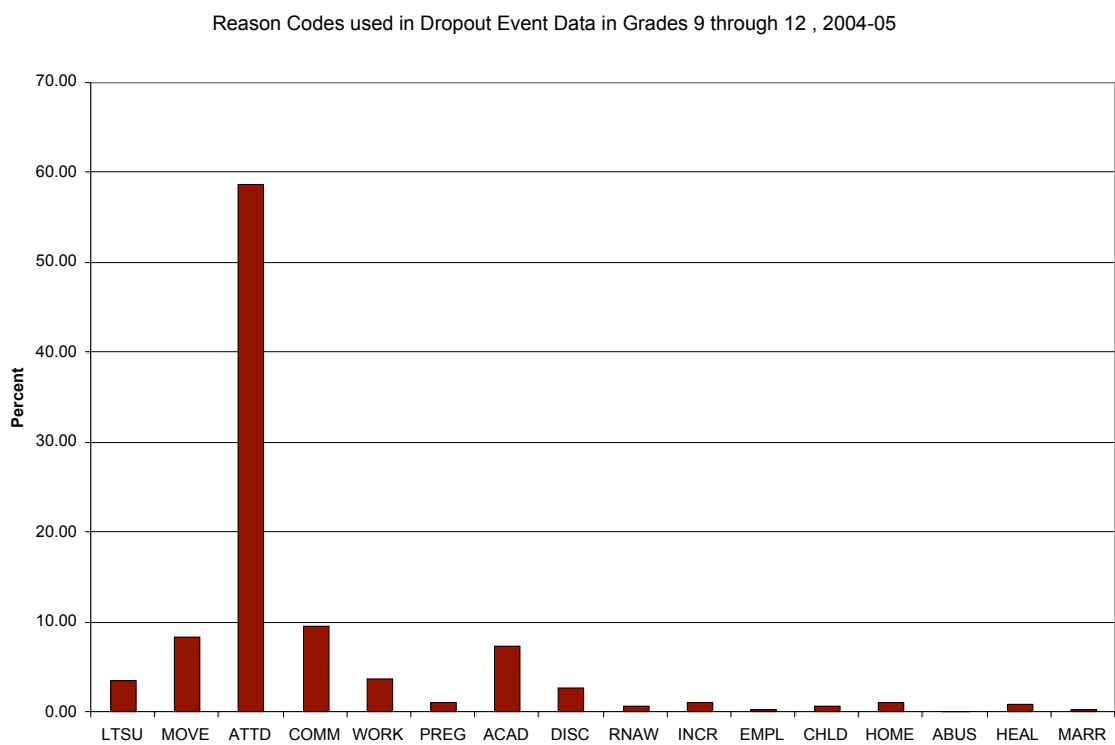


Figure 4. Percent of reason codes used in the 2004-05 dropout event data collection in grades 9 through 12.

Gender and race of dropouts

Males have historically dropped out more frequently than females, and this was borne out in the 2004-05 dropout event data. In grades 1 through 12, males accounted for approximately 59 percent of the dropout events, and females for 43 percent. White students accounted for 58.7 percent of the dropout events in grades 9 through 12; Black students accounted for 31.1 percent in those grades.

Figure 5 illustrates a further disaggregation of the 2004-05 dropout events in grades 1 through 12 by ethnic and gender groups.

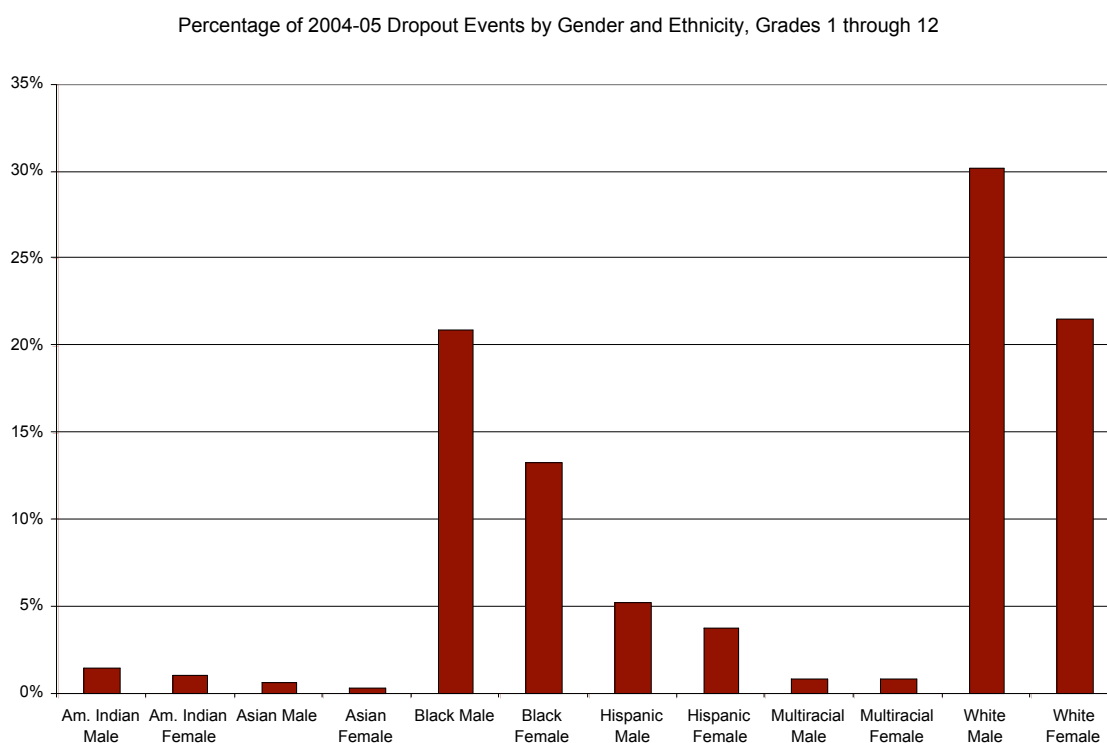


Figure 5. 2004-05 dropout events in grades 1 through 12 disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.

Certain ethnicities were over-represented in 2004-05 dropout counts, as they were in previous years. The state's average dropout event rate for grades 1 through 12 student population in 2004-05 was approximately 1.7 percent. American Indian students, however, dropped out at a rate of 2.9 percent; Hispanic students left school at a rate of 2.1 percent; and Black students dropped out at a rate of 1.8 percent. White students dropped out at a rate slightly below average, at 1.5 percent, and Asian students dropped out at a rate that was well below average, at 0.9 percent. Figure 6 illustrates the dropout event rates among ethnic and gender groups. American Indian students have the highest dropout event rates; males at 3.2 percent and females at 2.5 percent. Hispanic males account for the next highest rate (2.4%), followed by Black males (2.2%).

2004-05 Dropout Event Rates among Gender and Ethnic Groups, Grades 1 through 12

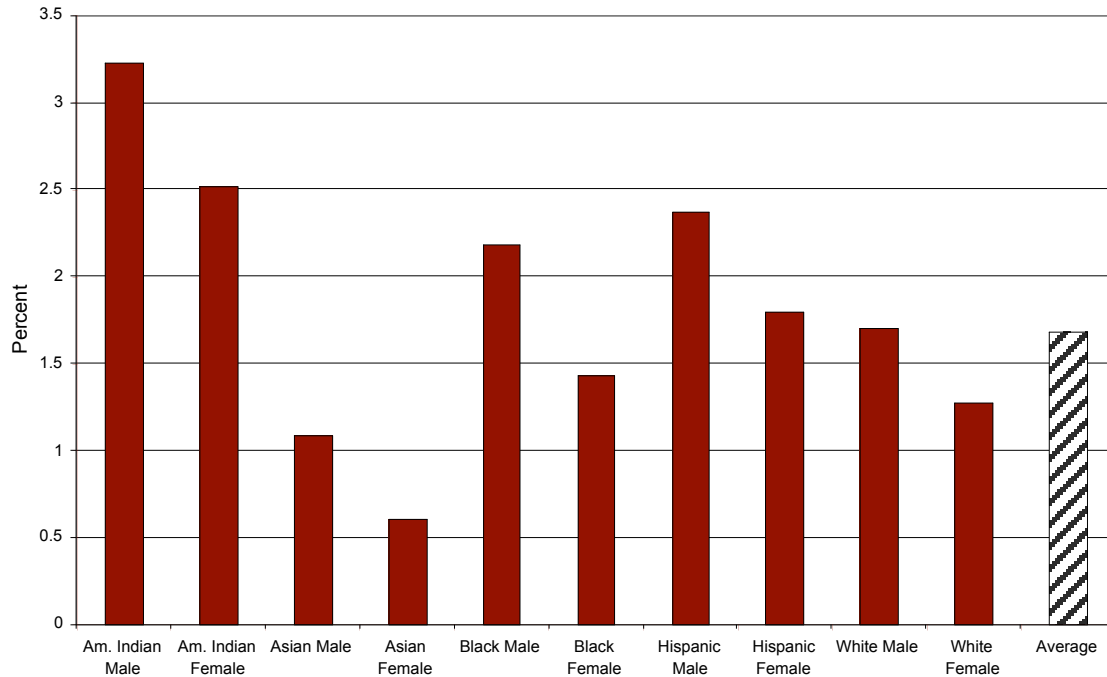


Figure 6. Dropout event rates among ethnic and gender groups in grades 1 through 12 compared to the average rate of all dropouts in 2004-05.

Another way of looking at dropout data by ethnicity is to focus on the high school years, grades 9 through 12. The current dropout event rate of each ethnic group in grades 9 through 12 can be compared to historic event rates in those grades to determine if gaps are closing. In 2004-05, dropout event rates for all ethnic groups declined. The greatest decline in the dropout event rate was for Black students, at nearly .4 percent. Figure 7 illustrates the dropout event rates by ethnic group in grades 9 through 12 for the past four years.

Dropout Event Rates in Grades 9 through 12: Four Years

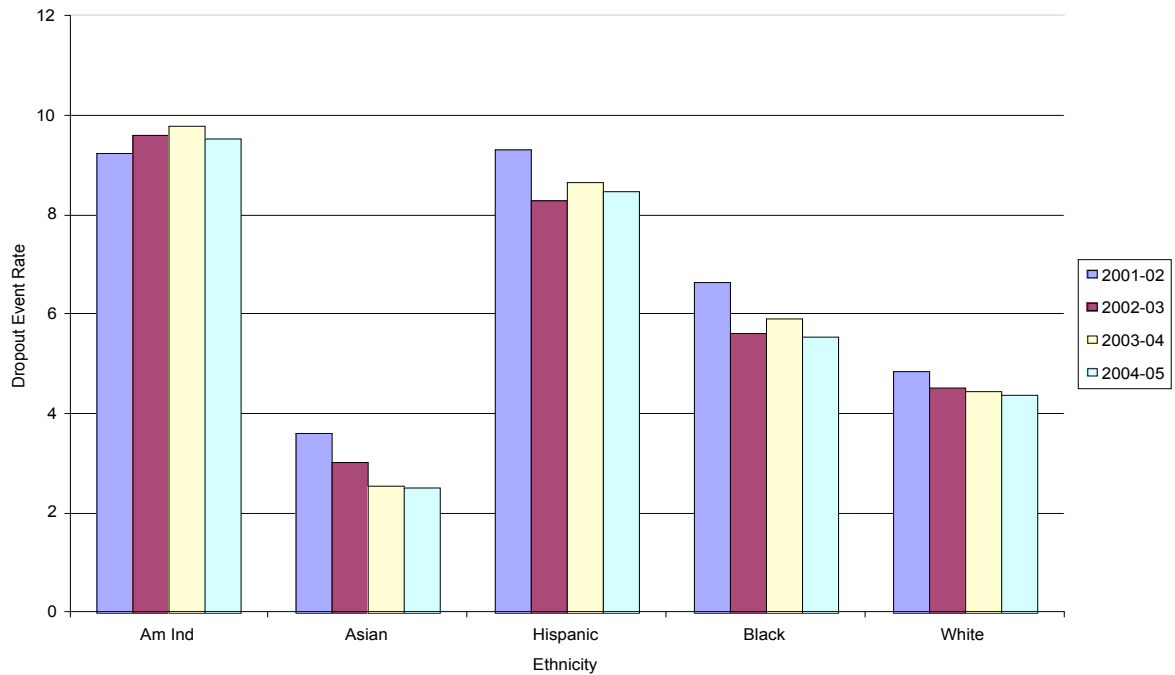


Figure 7. Dropout event rates among ethnic groups in grades 9 through 12 from 2001-02 to 2004-05.

Summary

In 2004-05, the dropout event rate in grades 1 through 12 declined in North Carolina's public schools. This was only a slight decline, however, from the previous year. Most historical trends continued, with three noteworthy exceptions:

1. There was a slight increase in the percent of students who dropped out at Grade 12.
2. There was a marked increase in the percent of dropout events coded as "Enrollment in a community college" over the previous three years.
3. There were more students coded as "Expulsions."

The costs of students dropping out of school is high. North Carolina policymakers and educators can benefit from information shared at a fall 2005 symposium at Columbia University on the economic and social toll of students who drop out of school. These data were presented at the Columbia symposium:

- America loses 1.6% of Gross Domestic Product in combined income and tax revenue losses with each cohort of 18 year olds who never complete high school.²

- If all single mothers who are high school dropouts earned high school degrees, 125,000 to 292,000 fewer women would be on the welfare rolls, saving \$1.5 to 3.5 billion annually.³
- Had graduation rates in 1990 been 1% higher, an estimated 400 fewer murders and 8,000 fewer assaults would have taken place. Nearly 100,000 fewer crimes would have taken place overall.⁴
- Health-related losses for dropouts in 2004 come to nearly \$100,000 per student. Their health, at age 18, is similar to a more educated person 20 years older.⁵

A recent article⁶ in the *Phi Delta Kappan* (Professional Journal for Education) featured research on former high school dropouts who had since become successful college students. Much that has been written about dropouts focused on demographic factors like race and family income, but this article focused on the particular high school experiences of these former dropouts.

The authors concluded that the specific school experiences that these students had, the policies that were in place in their schools, and the professionals that the students interacted with in their high schools had a profound impact on the students' decisions to drop out.

In this research, the former dropouts had highly-charged negative experiences in their high schools. They recalled incidents related to teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators. They also discussed their schools' organizational barriers that influenced their decision to drop out.

The students who participated in focus groups recounted their stories very emotionally, which suggested to the researchers that their school experiences had a major impact. The authors of the article argued that their research was a wake-up call to high schools.

There were implications for those who work in high schools and for those who make the policies that govern high schools. When addressing why students drop out of school, it may be worthwhile to remember the conclusions presented in the *Kappan* article:

1. Regulations should not prevent student success, i.e., the structure of the school should exist to support students, not punish them.
2. Educators should pay attention to students' home lives.
3. Guidance counselors should not label students.
4. Teachers should conduct needs assessment for their students and tailor their instruction accordingly.

Notes:

¹The dropout data for this report were collected by the Division of Agency Operations and Management and compiled by the Information Technology

Business Delivery Division. The Curriculum and School Reform Services Division produced the annual report.

- ²Rouse, C. (2005, October 25). *The labor market consequences of an inadequate education*. Paper presented at the fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education." Retrieved December 8, 2005, from <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/resource/Details.asp?PresId=3>
- ³Garfinkel, I., Kelly, B., & Waldfogel, J. (2005, October 24). *Public assistance programs: how much could be saved with education*. Paper presented at the fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education." Retrieved December 8, 2005, from <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/resource/Details.asp?PresId=7>
- ⁴Moretti, E. (2005, October 25). *Does education reduce participation in criminal activities?* Paper presented at the fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education." Retrieved December 8, 2005, from <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/resource/Details.asp?PresId=6>
- ⁵Muennig, P. (2005, October 25). *Health returns to education interventions*. Paper presented at the fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education." Retrieved December 8, 2005, from <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/resource/Details.asp?PresId=5>
- ⁶Golden, S., Kist, W., Trehan, D.M., & Padak, N. (2005). A teacher's words are tremendously powerful: stories from the GED scholars' initiative. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87, 311-315.